

*Prisoners of War*

In existing circumstances, hon. members will be particularly concerned to know of conditions affecting Canadian prisoners of war in the far east.

The government has naturally been gravely concerned over reports of conditions among prisoners of war in Japanese hands. Every effort has been made to secure information, and every possible method of improving conditions has been explored. In collaboration with the other commonwealth governments, official protests have repeatedly been made through the protecting power. The Japanese have ignored these protests, or made hypocritical or cynical replies.

According to latest reports, about one thousand Canadian prisoners of war have been transferred from Hong Kong to Japan; between five and six hundred remain in Hong Kong. It would seem that the prisoners at Hong Kong are not suffering nearly so much from ill-treatment and abuse as from neglect. They are suffering from the failure of the Japanese government to provide adequate clothing, food and medical care.

As yet, no reports have been received about the camps in Japan to which the Canadians from Hong Kong have been transferred. It is believed that these men are better off than they were in Hong Kong.

The government had hoped that the Japanese would be influenced by the protests made through the protecting power and the appeals made by the International Red Cross. Pending the results of these representations, it was thought that a public indictment of Japanese behaviour would not help our men in their hands.

The government and the Canadian Red Cross have been doing their utmost to make good the failure of the Japanese, by sending to our men the needed supplies, but the Japanese have largely frustrated our efforts. Some supplies went forward to the far east on the SS. *Gripsholm* in the first exchange of diplomatic officers and civilians in 1942. After loss and pilferage and months of delay, part at least of these supplies reached Hong Kong. But the supplies sent on the *Gripsholm* in 1943—at the time of the second exchange—were carried to Japan. Although weeks have passed, no word has been received that they have yet reached their destination.

A joint effort by the governments and Red Cross societies of Canada and the United States to send a shipload of supplies also failed because of the refusal of the Japanese to grant a safe conduct to the vessel which had already been loaded with supplies.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

Negotiations with the Japanese government through the protecting power and the International Red Cross resulted in arrangements for the shipment of supplies to Vladivostok, thence to be transhipped to Japanese territory. The first shipment sent by the Red Cross societies of Canada and the United States reached Vladivostok months ago. Despite the previous negotiations, and despite the need of the prisoners of war for whom these supplies were destined, they remain in Vladivostok.

The Japanese also have done little to assist and much to obstruct the forwarding of mail to and from prisoners of war. The few letters which have been delivered have taken long months to reach the prisoners. Recently the Japanese placed a limit of twenty-five words on letters to and from prisoners of war.

The Japanese have been equally neglectful of their obligation to transmit reports through the protecting power and the International Red Cross. Reports of deaths of prisoners of war have been transmitted only after long delay. Reports of transfers of Canadian prisoners of war from Hong Kong to Japan are still incomplete.

All of this is in marked contrast with the treatment which Japanese nationals have received in Canada.

It is the duty of a belligerent to permit representatives of the protecting power and the International Red Cross regularly to visit prisoner of war camps. The Japanese have permitted some such visits to certain camps in Japan, but so far only one visit by a representative of the protecting power has been permitted at Hong Kong. After long delay, the International Red Cross was permitted to name a representative there, but so far we have not seen evidence that he is being allowed to carry out fully the usual functions of a delegate of the International Red Cross.

Although not a signatory to the convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war signed at Geneva July 27, 1929, nor to the earlier conventions, the Japanese government at the commencement of hostilities, gave an undertaking to abide by their provisions. Japan has failed to live up to this undertaking.

Whether the Japanese government in Tokyo is unable, or unwilling to induce the military authorities outside Japan to act like human beings, the responsibility for inhuman treatment of prisoners rests none the less at Tokyo. This guilt will not be forgotten.